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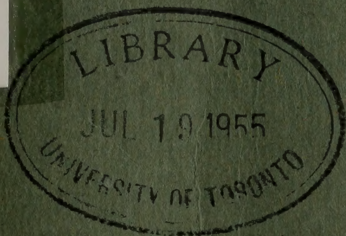
EN CENT POCKET SERIES NO. 326
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Hints on Writing Short Stories

Charles J. Finger



HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY
GIRARD, KANSAS

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INTRODUCTION

In this I have not compiled a guide to rhetoric in the conventional style of the Correspondence Schools. My aim has been to convey to you a number of ideas. When you have read the book, there should remain, forever fixed in your mind, this:

Truth is the final test of merit in literature.

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I.

ON CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS.

This, let me say, is my third attempt to write this booklet. Two drafts went into the waste basket. The truth is that I found them too stiff and formal, and in the doing of that which I wish to do, formality must be sedulously avoided, for, otherwise, we run on a rock and get nowhere. It seems to me that the best plan in telling you what I have to say will be one in which curtness and directness is observed, for very direct and brief I have always found those to have been who were instructors and not teachers. Not in long and labored discourses have I found valuable lessons, but rather in very sudden "Don'ts" and "Do's," in warnings and in checkings. Indeed, something of that would seem to be the natural way, especially if you consider how wonderfully children learn from children. Youngsters never lecture one another, yet they teach their fellows all manner of elaborate games with a few simple directions. On the other hand, not only teachers, but also parents, too often flounder in a mist of explanation and so fail to make anything clear. I know that in my own life almost everything that I have learned I seem to have acquired suddenly. In the midst of much struggle, a warning word, a caution shot from someone who knew did what tons and volumes of

theoretical instruction had failed to do. There was swimming for instance. As a lad I had read books on the art, diligently going through arm and leg motions at night while balanced on a stool. I had memorized instructions and had filled my memory with facts as to swimming contests among the ancient Egyptians. Then, one day, floundering in a pool with a secret vision of a slow and painful death burdening me, an older lad shouted, "Push at the water with your feet—push hard," and lo! the trick was learned. It was much the same when I learned to ride a bicycle. I had made sudden swoops and turns, had borne down on rocks, and holes, and ruts, with strange accuracy. I had hit all that I tried to avoid. Then my brother yelled at me, "Don't bear so heavy on the handle bars," and a great light dawned, for I saw that my misdirected energy had been my drawback. Then, too, when learning to shear sheep in South America. The sheep, the shears, the fleece, and I seemed to be dangerously mixed, and, while other men about me did their hundred and seventy ewes a day with ease, I sweated and groaned over twenty-five. But a wise old Irish shepherd who was watching me gave me a hint. As he walked away, he growled, "Keep the shears flat on the hide and take big bites." And again the curtain was lifted, so that that day I tallied my hundred and ten.

For these and other reasons I have always been suspicious of elaborate books of instructions, and also of professors, of correspondence schools, and of institutes purporting to teach

this, that and the other: how to raise your salary: how to be prosperous: how to be a society success: how to acquire a mastery of the English langauge while shaving: how to develop the qualities of leadership and rule others: how to write short stories and become a successful author. And, indeed, talking with other men, I find that each holds that his own business, profession, or calling, most certainly cannot be taught by mail, nor acquired in such manner that the reader of a dozen or more mimeographed letters may hope to make a living by it. On this every man is emphatic. Nor scanning advertisements, lists of men wanted, do I see this: "graduates of correspondence schools preferred." Certainly, when I was an employer in the railroad business, I never employed a locomotive engineer on the strength of a diploma dated from Scranton, Pa. Nor have I met a banker, stone mason, professional hobo, concert pianist or a farm-hand who, good at his life's work, had clipped and mailed a coupon, received a hundred page book, and, from such humble beginnings achieved mastery of his chosen task. Further, being once idle and mischievous I made a list of names of several who offer to teach the Demosthenian art. These, in the course of time, I visited at "Department 1234," or at the Cicero Institute in Chicago, or wherever the office was located, but although I have reached the inner circles in giant corporations, in government houses, in banking institutions, I failed to pass the guardian stenographer and so

reach the orator himself. Neither, on further investigation, could I find that Chauncey Depew, Ingersoll, Billy Sunday, Henry Ward Beecher, Herbert S. Bigelow or William Jennings Bryan ever took lessons in a correspondence school. Still pursuing my quest, I also made a list of names of those teaching the art of short story writing, whether they were hidden in the arcana of correspondence schools, taught in the marble halls of colleges or universities, or in the shacks of the Y. M. C. A., to find that those names did not appear as authors in the table of contents of well-known magazines, nor anywhere else where one might reasonably suppose that they would be eager to see their own names as practitioners of the art they professed to teach. Nor did it transpire that executives and those who have control of men, captains of industry or those who weld others to their own desires, college professors or bishops, had, before gaining their present eminence, risen up one dark morn in a dull December to make a test of their efficiency by answering for themselves a list of forty questions as propounded in the advertising section of some magazine, and, realizing their lack of Personality, had straightway enrolled themselves for a "correspondence course," in the course of time to receive a diploma and become a Gary, a Schwab, a Wanamaker, a Woodrow Wilson, a Harriman or a Lloyd George. No. No. Things do not come that way.

From all of which, you can see that I do not

believe that much good can be done in the way of teaching by mail, nor even by book. Nor can you, I hold, by reading an analysis of a short story or a novel, write one. You can no more do that than you can, after dissecting a human corpse, construct a man. True, you may, with some advantage read the things other men have done, but it does not therefore follow that you yourself can do them, even though you have the desire and the will. For instance, I am a very poor mechanic. To handle machinery is a thing distasteful to me. I might read twenty-four books on the method of adjusting a timer on an automobile, but, when my own timer gets out of order I am dumfounded, nor will all my theoretical knowledge stand me in stead. My son, on the other hand, who has never read a book on the mechanism of an automobile, actually rejoices when the car stalls. The light of joy is in his eye and he leaps from the seat and goes to work with enthusiasm, pooh-poohing such things as I tell him from my corner in the car as the result of my reading. He is contemptuous of authority and is all for independent verification.

Why then, in the face of all this, do I write this booklet? For, admittedly, I cannot teach you to write a short story although I have written dozens of them.

Here is the answer. If you have both the ability and the desire to write, I can tell you of some pitfalls to be avoided and can give you a hint or two. I can also give you the result of my own experience, and that is about all.

It may result in something, and again it may not. Certainly during the past year, I have had the pleasure of seeing three young writers get their work in print as a result of some such advice as I propose to write here. But I shall not, I promise you, pad the book, nor copy out stories written by masters in the art, in the approved way of the correspondence schools and the "institutes." That would sadly waste both your time and mine. So, to work.

II.

THE KEY NOTE.

In the first place there must be *Sincerity.* Without that nothing can be done. Sincere work will be good work, and sincere work will be original work. With sincerity, you will have honesty and simplicity, both of which are cardinal virtues in the literary man. Also, with sincerity there will be courage. You know, as well as I know, that when you meet an insincere man, you detect him at once. Were you ever deceived, for instance, by the rounded periods of some political rhetorician? Perhaps for a moment you may have been carried away in spite of your better sense, but, certainly, the effect was not lasting. Examining yourself, you will certainly remember that before you could persuade others, you had to be thoroughly convinced of the essential right of the thing itself. In the same fashion then, you must be persuaded of the truth of that which you wish to be accepted when writing. I do

not speak of controversial matters. I write of fiction. You must have so thoroughly identified yourself with your characters that they are as living creatures to you. Then only shall they be living characters to your readers. If you have read the Pickwick Papers and have learned to know and love *Samuel Pickwick*, you will know exactly what I mean. In that character, the young Charles Dickens lost himself. In creating Mr. Pickwick he was entirely sincere. He watched the character grow from a somewhat simple-minded old gentleman to a lovable, jolly fellow to meet whom you would walk half round the world. Pickwick was real to Dickens, therefore he is real to us. Observe this too; he had his faults. *Mr. Pickwick* would not have been considered a good or a moral character to many of the "unco guid" of today. He often drank too much. Had there been nation wide prohibition in England in his day, he would certainly have drunk home brew with *Ben Allen* and *Bob Sawyer*, exactly as he went to prison for conscience sake. He and his companions enjoyed the pleasures of the table too well for latter-day tastes. He was obstinate on occasion, just as I am obstinate. Had Dickens been insincere, he might have been tempted to sponge out the bad spots in his character. But then he would have given us something that was not a man. The truth is that we want something of the senuous and the gross in those about us. None of us want to live with angels and saints. So we reject instinctively as impossible and unpleasant, those perfect, etherealized crea-

tions some times found in stories—those cre tures all compounded of nobility, courage, beauty, generosity and wisdom which insincere writers try to foist upon us. They do not ring true. We detect their hollowness just as we detect the hollowness of the flamboyant boastings of the political orator.

Indeed, to a reading man, the creations of the imagination of sincere writers are much more real than the famous characters of history. At least they are so to me. I read of a Washington with all his ugly spots carefully painted out; of a Napoleon carefully deified; of a Garfield carefully haloed; and I mentally reject them as impossible. On the other hand I become acquainted with a *Captain Costigan*, a *Becky Sharp*, a *Jack Falstaff*, an *Uncle Toby*, a *Tom Jones*, a *Martin Wade*, a *Peter Whiffle*, an *Ann Veronica* and they enter into my life. I know them utterly. I meet their twins in life. This woman has the green eyes of Becky. That man has his aspirations, leads a life that he knows to be a wrong way but still leads it, exactly as did *Tom Jones*. Or I recall a foolish fellow whose interest in life led him into all sorts of odd corners and am immediately reminded of *Peter Whiffle*. But I never meet a man who reminds me of Napoleon or of Washington, because there are no such men. In other words, the sane fiction writer has been sincere—the historian has been insincere. In the effort to give a mere man a heritage of honorable fame, the historian created something infamous, something inhuman.

III.

ON CHARACTER MAKING IN FICTION.

As my own personal character is by no means perfect, or even complete though imperfect, it follows that I cannot teach you how to draw a character. Certainly, I have, however sketchily, drawn a few characters in different stories, but I find that they were all more or less an aspect of myself. I have never yet committed a murder, but I have hated some people so fiercely that I have imagined the killing of them. So, the mood being on me, I once wrote a story called "Ebro" in which the hero was a murderer. But, in a way, *Ebro* was myself. Again, once in the long ago, when I was young and beautiful, I started on a wild trip in a small sail boat from the Straits of Magellan bound for the Falkland Islands. We had been in search of hidden treasure, which we did not find, and, having been in forbidden places, were forced to flee. Now some two hundred miles from shore we ran into a storm and there was much to do. During that storm I was terribly afraid. Like any other coward, I died a hundred deaths. That experience I remembered and it came to light when I wished to write the story, "My Friend Julio," wherein was portrayed a man much terrified by wind and water. So, in my imagination, one way or another, I have broken each and every one of the ten commandments. Some, of course, I have broken in reality. The heroes, or characters I draw then, as I see it, are merely pictures of myself seen

from this angle or that, the same individual in his varied moods. It is somewhat like the watching of a diamond and seeing different colored rays as the light from this facet or that is caught. In every man are many vices as well as many virtues. Each must know himself, see himself naked and as he is, without idealistic fig leaves.

Still, though I cannot tell you what to do, I can chart a few shoals so that you shall not run aground too early in your literary voyage.

First of all then, as I have said, there is the prime necessity of Sincerity. Second, no man can possibly write anything at all worth while except he see straight. By that I mean that most men do actually see things in a distorted kind of a way. I do not mean by this the habit of careless seeing, nor even of blurred seeing. What I do mean is that habit of not seeing at all for oneself, but seeing through the eyes of others. Take, for example, the people who have lived in a small town for a great many years and have heard political orators, Chautauquan lecturers, candidates for this office and that talk about the "handsome men and beautiful women, the intelligent children and public-spirited citizens" in the burg. You will find that many who have listened to that kind of thing year in and year out, do actually come to believe that their fellow townsmen and townswomen are thus and so. They become firmly convinced that theirs is a favored spot in which beauty abounds. Of course, a glance at any well-filled kodak album will reveal the fact that in place of a

wide-spread beauty, there is an incredible amount of vulgar and quite healthy ugliness. Or, again, if you ask a dozen men to describe the average American youth, eleven of them will conjure up a vision of some long-legged, square-shouldered fellow unlike anything on earth, or of some square-chinned, bright salmon-colored lad. Their notions, you will find, are derived, not from their own observation, but from seeing advertisements put out by wholesale clothing warehouses and makers of men's collars. Or imagining the American girl, they will see not what you may see, girls flabby, skinny, awkward, sloppy, tall, short, lopsided, sometimes pimpled, and, very rarely, one now and then really beautiful, but instead, some baby-faced creature with idiotic simper in the style of a magazine cover. Or again they will be led into unquestioning belief when the politician aforementioned who, ringing the changes upon all the familiar phrases of political oratory, and intoxicated with his own flamboyant boastings, perhaps whooping things up for war, declares that military training has made a generation of square-shouldered, deep-chested lads. People listening to him, who make the sign of the cross every time The Star Spangled Banner is played, will be quite oblivious to the fact that a moment's glance into any street will reveal the truth that, in spite of three years in the trenches, the young men of today slouch and stoop, lean and shuffle, and lounge against corners and posts just as much as ever they did before 1914. It will never occur to them that the square-shoul-

dered effect of the khaki-clad lad was entirely due to the odd cut of the coat. So, I add this then. SEE STRAIGHT.

Here is another law, or commandment, or guide, or whatever you choose to call it. I give it to you in seven words. SET DOWN THE THING AS IT IS. Do that and you get somewhere. Fail to do it and you inevitably get nowhere. That rule, of course, loops back on the one preceding it, for before the thing can be set down as it is, one must be sure that it is seen as it is. The trouble is that so much is about us that tends to distort. Pictorial artists, newspaper men, moving picture producers are all in league to get a "feature" angle on things, so it comes about that presently we are in such fix that we actually mistrust the evidence of our own senses. Not so long ago I attended a piano recital in which the performer played several compositions which I know so well that I could tell you every note in every chord. But the clumsy fellow came a cropper, turning his minor chords here and there into majors, dropping his octaves and making a great muddle of things. From force of habit, or convention, the audience applauded and the player bowed with happy smile, whereupon the audience cheered the more lustily. The next day the local paper came out with an account of the affair praising the player in terms which, if applied to a Liszt, would still be extravagant. After that, you could no more shake the audience in its admiration of the player as a highly skilled fellow than you could persuade it

that the moon had turned to green cheese. Ignorance won the day. Hearing the applause, even those who knew something of music mistrusted their senses. Let a word be dropped in criticism, and the newspaper report was produced. There it was. What more was needed? A wrong notion was born because of convention, and fostered because of wilful or ignorant distortion, with the result that hundreds of young children for years to come would learn music from an incompetent fellow. Nor, probably, would those children, with one or two exceptions, ever learn to play straight.

Again go to a picture theater in which is being shown a reel or two of Current Events. Roughly speaking, you would imagine, judging from the scenes displayed, that all that was ugly, hideous, vulgar had disappeared from the world. And naturally so, because active selection has been at work. To get a "good" picture, the camera man and his assistants had seen to it that undesirable sights were avoided or hidden. In the course of time, seeing hundreds or thousands of such pictures, the average man arrives at wrong notions as to things about him. Indeed, it is only when the same man goes far from home to another country, or to a far away city, that his eye and mind begin to function. Then new things strike him. He compares them, not with the things as they are in his own home, but with the things he has seen portrayed, which is a vastly different matter. As a consequence, he finds the new to compare very unfavorably with the

old as he imagines the old to be. Then he becomes verbose and a nuisance to those around him, telling of the glories of things in Tucumcari or wherever he may have hailed from. He forgets, or never saw, that in his native habitat there was ugliness, brutality, debauchery, disease and deformities. So presently, your traveler returns home, tells tales of foreign parts and deplores the state of things abroad which are, after all, exactly the same as in his own home town. You see, in the new place his eyes were opened. He was shocked into seeing. In his own town he saw so often that he ceased to see, or, being incurious, saw through other eyes. So I have heard men deplore the poverty in rural districts in other countries, telling of women and children toiling in the fields under a hot sun, of families that ate little or no meat or fats from one end of the week to another, quite oblivious of the fact that in their own land also, children of tender age are taken from school to the field, and that in thousands of places throughout this country, sweet potatoes and beans form the staple diet. The same men will make merry at the expense of a simple Mexican who crosses himself when the thunder roars, or who wears a charm to ward off rheumatism, all unconscious of the fact that there are Americans in plenty who hold that a buckeye carried in the hip pocket will cure piles, or that the position of the quarter moon foretells dry or wet weather according to the way in which the horns are "up" or "down." Verily, I say unto you, it is the rarest of rare

things to find a man who can see straight, and except he see straight, how shall he set down things as they are?

To take this important matter from another angle, have you ever looked at a set of engravings by Hogarth? To be sure there are pictures by other artists, his contemporaries, but in them it is clear that there was elimination and distortion. But not so with Hogarth. He saw things as they were and so set them down. As a result, his work is as valuable to students of social manners and customs as are the diaries of Samuel Pepys. Not for him was the false picturization, the idealistic conception. To be sure the London of his day had its fine lords and ladies, but it had also its filthy beggars, its distorted and deformed men and women, its untidy children and haggard workers, its unfortunates with blotched and pimpled faces. So he gave us what he saw. Therefore Fame crowned him. First he was sincere, second he saw straight, and thirdly he set down the thing as it was. Pepys too did that. So did Holinshed and Fielding. Their names live. Aphra Behn played the game the other way and is forgotten. Also vanished the names of "Ouida" and of Charles Brockden Brown.

IV.

PREJUDICE.

Still, let a man set himself deliberately to see straight, to look at things without either rose-colored or smoke-dimmed glasses, and even then it is not certain that there is free-

dom from distortion. Just as the children studying music, of which I wrote a few pages back, were all unconsciously heavily handicapped, so are we also handicapped through no fault of our own. For one thing there has been grounded into us a certain prejudice called patriotism. It is really a reflex egoism. Because of it we are predisposed to look upon our own nation as standing alone on star-crowned heights and to regard all other nations and peoples as being in the gulf of ignorance, poverty and despair. So we get a one-sided impression. Blinded by national self-love, we see all good in our own people and little but evil in others, except those others be our allies, when we grant them some modicum of decent behavior and common sense just so long as, and no longer than, they identify their interests with ours. Nationally, we go in for the cygnification of geese on a gigantic scale. As may easily be seen, carried to excess, that kind of thing often results in hate. Not carried to such lengths, it means the ridiculing, as well as the misunderstanding of others, and in addition the fooling of ourselves. Consider the so-called "comic sheets" and the cheap vaudeville stage where the Frenchmen, Germans, Jews, Irishmen, Mexicans and all South Americans are used as laughing stocks. The reverse of the situation is seen in common, cheap literature where the American stands as the type of all that is admirable. Or, if you keep an attentive ear, you will not fail to note that the notion permeates in such strange way that it becomes very gen-

erally held, and even accepted to so wide an extent, that teachers teach their charges that there exist very strongly-marked national characteristics, as that the Dutch are very clean, the Mexicans very treacherous, Jews very much given to cheat, Germans to villainy and rape, Italians to idleness, Afro-Americans to light-heartedness, the French to immorality, the Irish to wit, the Scandinavians to pessimism, the Swiss to thrift and so on.

All of which is idle and pernicious clap trap, as a moment's quiet reflection will show. For each and every man in his experience has known among his own countrymen those who were clean and those who were dirty, those who were honest and those who were dishonest, those who were gloomy and those who were cheerful, those who were idle and those who were energetic. Moreover, every man knows that his own mood changes as the wind and he who is merry a-Monday may be very sad on Saturday, while he who is in the pink of honesty at 9 a. m. may easily be a thief at 9:30. Yet, for all the testimony of the daily papers and in spite of the records of the criminal courts, ninety-nine men out of a hundred are very thoroughly imbued with the idea that their country and its people have a practical monopoly of all the virtues. So, as might be expected, the notion gets into literature, modified it is true, but nevertheless it gets there.

To show it in its most crude form, I give an instance. It happened since I commenced this essay. A man called upon me and his eyes were bright and shining with excitement, for

he had what he imagined to be a good plot for a story, and had cut across lots to tell it to me. It ran something like this and I quote his words as nearly as possible.

"Here is a good plot for a short story or a moving picture. There's a young woman on the train, a Canadian, and she is a stranger to this here country. On the car she begins to talk with a well dressed drummer. She is innocent and all that kind of thing. But sitting across the aisle is a soldier. Well, at the depot this here drummer gets the girl to go with him to a hotel and just as they are getting into a taxi, up comes the soldier, and 'Biff,' he lands the drummer one that lays him flat. So the girl's safe. After a year or so the soldier comes from the war and finds the girl who is the daughter of a rich man. He's poor of course, the soldier. Well they marry and live happy . . . Of course, you can show the American ideals in this tale and also use it to bring about good relation between the English speaking people."

I will not insult the intelligence of the reader by pointing out the utter idiocy of the plot. Still, though the man who told me the story was intelligent, a lawyer in the government service, and a reader of the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *American Magazine*, several daily papers, and voted the straight party ticket every election, he failed to see the utter banality of the tale he suggested. But, it is a fair sample of the stuff with a "patriotic" base that many hundreds send to editors, and, more or less modified, watered, or spiced, you will at

times see something of the kind in moving-picture theaters.

So see this then; there are no characteristic national virtues and vices. Make your hero a negro, a Chinaman, an Eskimo or a Patagonian. It does not matter which. Man is man the world over, and it is, despite the old saying to the contrary, a safe rule to measure other's corn with your own bushel. What you must do is to conceive a character, then show him, not acting in any cut or dried fashion, but in a certain fashion. I say a certain fashion, but might have said an uncertain fashion, because your character will be more or less like yourself, a being with faults, virtues, vices, meannesses, ideals and hopes, and in him the potential angel will be mixed with a good deal of the ape, the tiger and the pig. Then, with your creation endowed with all the virtues and vices inextricably mixed, you have a character compounded of subtle and profound elements. Thus one sees that an action in a given case is indeed problematical. A man, witnessing overtures that may lead to the seduction of a girl, a stranger to him, whether the man was in uniform or not, would hardly be likely to make an assault upon the supposed seducer. To make him do that sort of thing is but to cater to the basest taste which glories in brute force. What a character would do would depend on many things—on his mood at the moment, whether he was drunk or sober, his immediate environment, his early training, what he had had for breakfast, what manner of rascal his grandfather was, how much money he

had in his purse at the time. Or it might depend on a mixture of many of these. Or again, the fictional personage might ponder and hesitate, finally taking no action at all, which, as a sensible man and being familiar with the old warning, "mind your own business," would very probably be his course. But the character might well be supposed to be wavering in a storm of emotion, perhaps to be swayed by subordinate characters, and, in the end, some action might be shown which would, as it were, grow out of the collision of the characters. For, bear in mind, the subordinate characters must not be made mere silhouettes—they also must have their prejudices and motives and ambitions, and the very form of their minds, too, must be made as evident to the reader as if they were in his presence.

Character drawing, as you see then, is a highly complicated business. Many, even among apparently sensible men, do not suspect this. For instance, not so long ago, I heard of a poet who declared that he could write a dozen good short stories between Tuesday and Saturday. His notion of fictional characters of course was of the allegorical order, a ticketed dummy in the form of the Sunday school book or of the transpontine melodrama, a row of Mr. Goodman's, Mr. Evil-Livers, Mr. Closepennies and so on. It never for a moment occurred to him that the test of good workmanship lay in the ability of the author to make a distinct impression on the reader, to make him remember the fictional personage as vividly as he remembered characters met in real life.

At this point, should you be earnest in your quest, really ambitious to go further, I recommend to your reading as masterpieces of character drawing, Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Thackeray's *Becky Sharp*, Cunninghame Grahame's *Minor Prophet* in his "Brought Forward," H. G. Dwight's *Like Michael* in his "Emperor of Elam," *Uncle Toby* in Sterne's Tristram Shandy, and the portrait of *Mrs. Poyser* in George Eliot's Adam Bede. Or, failing these, if you are a very busy man, buy in the present series, Nos. 41 and 72, and study the character of *Old Scrooge* in Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol, and of *The Scab* in the Color of Life.

V.

DANGEROUS ENTHUSIASM.

But there is another dangerous shoal, another literary Goodwin Sands strewn with the wreckage of ambitious but unskilled voyagers. For of all people urged to write, those generous souls eager to lend a hand in the making of a paradise on earth are hardest pressed. The very fact that a young author hates tyranny and injustice in a thorough and unhesitating way, results in a kind of distortion.. For him the evil pit of controversiality and partisanship yawns darkly. In his excess of zeal he paints with pigments too glaringly bright and too muddily brown. He makes his characters too black or too white, all evil or all good, according to their position in society. He is afflicted with an egoism of class, a fault every whit as gross as the

reflex egoism called patriotism. His judgment is warped by class prejudice. Because he burns with zeal, because he is carried away with enthusiasm, there is distortion. His heroes are those poor in this world's goods, his villains the wealthy, the powerful, the aristocratic. That wealth as well as poverty may entail hardship and unhappiness, the author with sociological bent often refuses to see, or seeing, wilfully denies. That worry and weariness and disappointment is not removed when one has mounted a little out of the pit, is a fact that escapes him. That injustices suffered by wage earners would be no less were the administration of affairs discharged by men taken from their own ranks, is entirely lost sight of. So there comes about a gross exaggeration and a painting of types. You may see something of this in George Bernard Shaw's "Unsocial Socialist." Walt Whitman sinned in like manner in his earlier days of writing. The fictional literature of advanced movements is full of class consciousness.

That kind of thing, of course, is fundamentally due to a kind of disguised self-interest once removed. It is really the inordinate love of self, or of class, as such. Consequently, it is bad art. And being that, it accomplishes nothing, because the reader sees through the ulterior motive. Furthermore, to do that kind of thing is to set down the thing as it is not. For, as you know, there are both rascals as well as gentlemen among wage-earners, just as there are rascals as well as gentlemen among

capitalists. There are scoundrelly poor people just as there are scoundrelly rich people. Honesty and dishonesty, truthfulness and lying, fair dealing and foul dealing are matters entirely apart from rank and position. Indeed, a story or a novel based on such insecure foundation, must, of necessity, ring false from first to last. There will be no health in it. The characters will be shown with glib phrases rolling off their tongues, talking as no man ever talks who expects to be taken seriously. The dialogue will be false and strained, and rich man and poor will talk like fourth-rate evangelists, camp-meeting hot-gospellers or insane tub thumpers. As a terrible example, turn to the socialistic speech made in a drawing room by *Cashel Byron*, the pugilist, in George Bernard Shaw's novel. The older, more experienced Shaw makes no such mistake. Contarst *Cashel Byron* for instance with his *Major Barbara.*

On the other hand, to see what a master craftsman can do, you must take "The Dream of John Ball" by William Morris, No. 37 of this series. If you have read it, you will not have forgotten the good, earnest priest, a most uncompromising truth-teller who had so profound a belief in realities and held an equally profound hatred of sham, cruelty and injustice. Looking back, you will recall in the little story a peculiar vein of pleasantry and delicate fancy with occasional touches of tenderness and of pathos that is extremely attractive. I call your particular attention to that story because it was written by a man

actuated by a passionate sympathy for humanity. For Morris was a radical to be sure, but his radicalism was tempered by a profound and logical sense of justice, by devotion to truth and reality and by intellectual ability and clarity. Perhaps in the whole field of English literature there is no better instance of pure intellect combined with enthusiasm for justice. And yet with all this, the aim of the story was to lead people to an understanding of the cause he had at heart, which was socialism. Yet withal, any one utterly opposed to that cause may read the book with keen pleasure, and not only that, but will inevitably be led to sympathize with the aims of *John Ball.*

Why is this? How does it come that one man burning with zeal for a cause will repel those he seeks to win to his side, while Morris won opposing minds to a sympathy with a doctrine they had denounced? If for a moment you try to imagine a Baptist, we will say, writing a book in such fashion that Catholics will not only read it with enjoyment but by its means will become interested in the Baptist creed, the magnitude of the task Morris accomplished will be manifest. The fact of the matter is that Morris did his work so well, felt the joys and the griefs of his characters so keenly, in a word was so sincere, that the reader lost his prejudices in the ideal life portrayed and was impelled to identify himself with the creatures of Morris' fancy in such wise that what hurt them, also hurt him. Both writer and reader overlooked the social

philosophy by reason of immense delight in the characters themselves. So also it was with those who read Dickens' "Nicholas Nickelby" and "Little Dorrit" and both books had so far-reaching an influence that the first resulted in the reformation of the private school system and the second in the abolition of imprisonment for debt.

In this connection I think that you will gain much advantage and get some good ideas if you will read "The Man of Property," by John Galsworthy, "The Growth of the Soil," by Knut Hamsun, and by Cunninghame Grahame, "Success," "Brought Forward," "Faith" and "Progress." I find in this series as valuable, "He Renounced the Faith," by Jack London and "The Miraculous Revenge" by George Bernard Shaw.

VI.

MURDER AND VIOLENCE.

A word should be said as to murder, bloodshed, suicide and other cheap effects. When you come to think of it, there is an appalling amount of bloodshed in our literature. I can go to my daughter's book shelf and take down novel after novel, turn the pages swiftly with a glance here and there, to hit upon the murder which I know instinctively is there with unerring accuracy. Or I can pass to the bookshelf in which the boys keep their favorites, and find brute force galore. Men are knocked down, punched, run through, thrown down stairways, kicked and cuffed. On every other

page there is manifest a mighty recklessness.

Now of that kind of thing I am suspicious. Looking back in my own life, which has been far from a quiet one, many years of which were spent in uncivilized places, I find that I have seen but few deeds of violence, as between man and man. I do not refer to riots, wars and organized bloodshed. I remember seeing one man killed outright, one duel with knives, one saloon rumpus and perhaps four men knocked down. My experience has been exceptional. Talking with friends, I find many who tell me that apart from school-boy days, they have never as much as seen a man knocked down or a blow struck. That, I believe, is the common experience. Many may easily go through life without witnessing a single act of violence. Certainly, the vast majority of men never dream of striking another. The world is prosaic. There are more *Doctor Primroses* in it than there are *Squire Westerns*. Men are more given to have a fancy for oratorical tirades and philosophical discussions like *Mr. Shandy*, than for fighting and battering one another about like *Everett True*. It would seem that since the advent of the four-reel thriller in the picture shows, murder in literature has somewhat gone out of fashion. There has, indeed, been a gradual letting down in the matter of violence since the days of Shakespeare and his forerunners. Time was when men and women had to be glutted with horrors and cruelties. Nothing less than blood or death would satisfy them. They had to be dazzled with the full bright-

ness of evil lusts. Only tales in which lewdness, cruelty, love of gold, shamelessness or vice were portrayed met with favor. No character was unmixed with sensuality in the days of Massinger and Ford. The fact is that the early writers, in constructing a man, did not dig down deep into the foundations.

Today it is different. There is a genuine attempt to become acquainted with man in his fullness. Especially is this seen in the work of the makers of present-day literature such as Conrad, Grahame, Galsworthy, Hergesheimer, Lawrence. The days are past when, if it became necessary to portray a man of courage, there was a digging into the depths of diabolical and unchained nature. Unrestrained will is no longer the keynote. The newer and higher idea hinges solely on character. The Berserker has been retired.

Of course, the main idea intended, was to display evidence of courage. But, any intelligent man may see, with a moment's thought, that the mere fact that a man fights, is no evidence at all of courage. He may fight because he is a coward, and fight to the death, too. For instance, suppose a man is challenged to fight a duel. The writer who has not dug into human nature will see bravery in the fellow who immediately accepts the challenge. To be sure there is a certain brute courage in the act of fighting. But of two men thus fighting a duel, one may be much braver than another. A man of imagination, who foresees pain and death, is obviously braver than another who

has no imagination at all, just as a boy who fears the dark, but yet bottles up his fear and goes into the dark, is braver than a boy without that fear. As is easily seen, the second boy is not brave at all. And in the case of the supposed duel, a man who fears public opinion very much indeed, will fight rather than be counted a coward, and therefore is actually a coward. So, as you see, which is what I wish to point out, there is no *outward* mark by which we can affirm that a particular action is courageous or the reverse. But if you sit down and write a story in which a character is so well portrayed that the reader will see quite plainly that a man fighting to the death is doing it because of his cowardice, you will have made a story that will find a publisher in no time. Handle the theme well, and I promise you that you shall have no rejection slip. One of the stories that O'Brien listed as among the best in 1920 was based on this theme, though it pictured a suicide who coldly and deliberately swam to his death, not that he feared life, but because his conscience hurt him, he having once failed to kill a fellow who was a military brute.

Perhaps you have read Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger," a tale in which the reader is left wondering, is given something to think of. The effect upon the reader is something like the effect left after seeing Ibsen's "Doll's House." So it would be in a tale such as above outlined. The reader would ponder deeply, if indeed he would not be torn between two emotions. Did the fighter fight

because he did not fear death, or did he fight because he feared public opinion more than death? At first blush, you may say, "It is obvious that he was a coward." But, consider a moment. Is the average man given to subtle distinctions? For instance, during the war, when some went to jail for their opinions, were not many torn with conflicting ideas? Were pacifists brave? Were they cowards? Were they actuated by fear of death or were they courageous enough to defy public opinion and the charge of cowardice, to give up their own liberty and happiness for conscience sake?

Take another theme, or rather angle of the same theme. Suppose a character similar to the average man: somewhat timid, careful to keep within the bounds of the law, tied to his business hand and foot, his expenses keeping neck and neck with his income, anxious to avoid publicity of an unpleasant nature. Yet he is a thoughtful man and a law-abiding one, and, therefore, opposed to all forms of mob law. Moreover, like the most of us, he shrinks from physical pain, and cannot kill a chicken without a beating of the heart. We will also suppose that he is violently opposed to war. To him comes one day another, suspected by a lawless mob doing deeds of violence in the name of "patriotism." Call it the Ku Klux Klan, the American Legion, a Law and Order League or what you will. Although trembling, in an agony of terror, fearing for his own life, yet the character we have in mind shelters the fugitive.

Here you have the opposition between physical and moral courage. The searching mob seeing him pale and fearful would know him for an arrant coward, and he himself would certainly admit himself to be that. Yet, knowing his motive, we see that he was essentially brave, since his fear was subordinated by a conscious effort to the end in view.

I believe enough has been said to show why, if you would write a short story involving the exemplification of courage, it is not at all necessary to fall back upon brute force.

It is somewhat in this connection that I would lightly sketch a talk I had with a young writer who had submitted a story in which he outlined a "brave" feminine character—a woman who had faced a little mob. I had held that the mere fact of facing a mob, when a woman did it, was no great sign of courage. But the conversation had not a single beginning. We had talked of other things, and he had objected to a scene in the novel "Dust" in which *Martin* had seemed to hold a light regard for woman's comfort in the chapter in which *Rose* accused him of caring more for the welfare of a fine-blooded cow than for his own wife. *Martin*, you may remember, had held that altogether too much fuss was made by women, and sometimes men, about child-bearing—that it was a natural function just as is teeth growing. My young friend held that the whole scene was derogatory to American ideals of "womanhood." Then we looped back to his short story.

It seems to me that there is a great deal

of what the English call "tosh" about "womanhood." When *Martin* compared the cow with the women to the detriment of the latter, as far as fuss in the matter of young-bearing, he was obviously right. On first reading the passage there came to my mind Whitman's poem in which he tells of his admiration for the cattle in the field because they were so "calm and self-possessed." Like *Martin*, and Whitman, I hold that both men and women have much to learn from animals.

To touch on the other, and co-lateral branch of the subject of our conversation. I held that the act of the woman who stood in front of a little mob bent on mischief was an act apparently, but not really, involving danger. The same act performed by a man most certainly would be courageous, but not in the case of the woman, because she would bank upon popular opinion as to the weakness of her sex. The opinion was her protection. She well knew that the rioters would not club her, a woman, and it was her "womanhood" that she counted on to preserve her. Hers then was a spurious bravery. So also is the man-killing woman a fake heroine. A woman may shoot a man, especially in the case of a so-called seduction, with the chances all in her favor that she will never be found guilty of murder. Pose as a heroine as she will, yet she knows perfectly well that she may rely on the support of a clamorous, sentimental and often hypocritical section of public opinion.

VII.

PLOT AND PROBABILITY.

There seems to be little to be said as to plot. I note that the books of instruction, weighty affairs some of them, more than a third of which seems to be badly assimilated from some handbook of grammar, lay great emphasis on plot. I hold that the first and most important thing is to create a character. You will naturally create secondary characters and out of them a situation will grow, and the situation is the plot. But for the rest of it, I believe that an imaginative man will find ideas for stories in all kinds of odd and unsuspected little things. H. G. Wells has told us somewhere how he saw a leaf floating on a little pool and that leaf suggested a canoe, the canoe again suggesting a lone man. From that grew the story of Epyornis Island. Turning to other of his stories, you can certainly discover for yourself what may have been the germ of the idea. There is his fine "Country of the Blind," which every ambitious writer should read. You easily see that the tale grew out of a pondering over the saying, "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed is king." Again, thousands of men have watched hens scratching in a yard and to them has come the thought of wonder as to what would happen were men creatures of but an inch in stature, with other birds and beasts their present size. But it was Wells who conceived the notion of making a story out of it, and a

gorgeous story it is, as any one who has read "The Food of the Gods" will admit.

Then there is R. B. Cunninghame Grahame, king of short story writers, as I believe. I pick up a book of his tales. It is "Brought Forward." More properly they might be called sketches. I turn to the first at which the book opens. It is "With the North-East Wind," a brief but tremendously vivid account of the funeral of Keir Hardie. I wish you would read it for yourself. Grahame is a wonder. Never did a mind figure to itself with more exact detail or greater energy all the parts and tints of a picture. Read this, which is the opening paragraph:

"A northeast haar had hung the city with a pall of gray. It gave an air of hardness to the stone-built houses, blending them with the stone-paved streets, till you could scarcely see where the houses ended and the street began. A thin gray dust hung in the air. It colored everything, and people's faces all looked pinched with the first touch of autumn cold. The wind, boisterous and gusty, whisked the soot-grimed city leaves about in the high suburb at the foot of a long range of hills, making one think it would be easy to have done with life on such an uncongenial day."

And, while I promised to refrain from long quotations, I cannot but help giving you this from the same sketch, for it seems to me a remarkable description of a crowd of men. I call your attention to Grahame's way of doing it:

"John Ferguson was there, the old time Irish leader, the friend of Davitt and of Butt. Tall and erect he stood, dressed in his long frock coat, his roll of papers in one hand, and with the other stuck in his breast, with all the air of be-

ing the last Roman left alive. Tom Mann, with his black hair, his flashing eyes, and his tumultuous speech peppered with expletives. Behind him, Sandy Haddow of Parkhead, massive and Doric in his speech, with a gray woolen comforter rolled round his neck, and hands like the panel of a door. Champion, pale, slight and interesting, still the artillery officer in spite of socialism: John Burns; and Small, the miners' agent, with his close brown beard and taste for literature. Smilie stood near, he of the seven elections, and then check weigher at a pit. There too, was silver-tongued Shaw Maxwell and Chisholm Robertson looking out darkly on the world through tinted spectacles; with him Bruce Glasier, girt with a red sash and with an aureole of fair curly hair around his head, half poet and half revolutionary."

If you do not see that what I am insisting on is, after all, the main thing, that is the portrayal of character even in those few light touches, then my time is wasted writing this essay.

I turn to another page and find the sketch, "A Minor Prophet." It is the tale of a man moved to preach his gospel of Love and Fellowship, and he preaches on, enwrapped in his subject, quite oblivious of the fact that one by one his little audience leaves, and then:

"He paused, and, looking round, saw he was all alone. The boys had stolen away, and the last workman's sturdy back could be just seen as it was vanishing towards the public house.

"The speaker sighed, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a soiled handkerchief.

"Then, picking up his hat and his umbrella, a far-off look came into his blue eyes as he walked homewards almost jauntily, conscious that the inner fire had got the better of the fleshly tenement, and that his work was done."

A fine ending to a fine piece of writing, indeed. Yet for "plot" the story has nothing but a man moved to preach and finding no hearers. Again, in "The Bathers," by H. G. Dwight, you have a first class piece of work, but nothing happens except a brief wrestle. Yet the story is both stirring and dramatic. A hundred delicate shades of character and temperament are shown us. But set before the reader is the invisible world of inward inclinations and dispositions.

As for probability, or, if you will, plausibility, about both of which the instructors are anxiously concerned, I do not believe that consideration of either enters into the matter of acceptance by editors. Tell a good story, and whether it deals with pterodactyls or fays, devils or angels, it will stand on its own merits as a story. You have seen Wells bringing the world to an end in many different ways: you have seen him carving animals into the shapes of men (Island of Dr. Moreau), or causing angels to be shot (The Wonderful Visit), or leaping into the Fourth Dimension (The Story of Mr. Davidson's Eyes), or travelling into the year 30,000 (Time Machine), but always there is verisimilitude. We know that it cannot be true, the tale he tells, but we are willing to believe with him that it is true. For romance is a legitimate field. If you can imagine a rattling good fairy story, go to it. Mark Twain wrote a good tale about a microbe and Verne wrote a good one about a trip on a meteor to the farthest edge of the solar system. There is plenty of room in be-

tween these for you. True, just at this present moment the pendulum swings toward realism, or, if it has not swung, at any rate there is a mountain of realistic stuff on hand, but at any moment a fantastic romance may leap into favor. So close your ears to the short story professors with their warnings against improbability and all that kind of thing. Write what you feel you must write, for if you must write, you must, and if you are not impelled to writing, not all the reading of books, nor listening to lectures will aid you one whit.

VIII.

ON SEX.

William Marion Reedy said, "In literature just now it is sex o' clock." He was deploring somewhat the insistence upon sex and sex matters that seems to be fashionable. We had a good talk on that, and, presently, that outspoken, clear-minded writer, Frank Putnam, joined in. So there were three editors, neither of whom had puritanical notions, all pretty much in accord. We came to a rough kind of conclusion that there was distortion of a kind when matters of sex occupied too prominent a place in literature. Understand me, no one of us were other than gross in part ourselves, but we knew that the part that sex played in our lives was very small as compared with other things. In some ill-defined way it seemed that in literature it should bear about the same proportion that it does in

actual life. In life, there are women who sell themselves, men who seduce, women who attract seducers, and those who get into all kinds of trouble because of sex, and that being the case, it is folly to hide it, or to pretend that things are otherwise. A writer should not be mealy mouthed. But when there is an over insistence upon sexual appetite, we are forced to believe that it can be explained only by the aberration of a perverted fancy. There is a happy medium between monsters of virtue all correct, constrained and charming, and human billy-goats. To be sure there is an impetuosity of the senses, an upwelling of the blood, but there is something else.

Unfortunately, nationally, we are given to false modesty. Perhaps it is the revolt against that which has made for this over insistence on sex in literature. If so, it will eventually prove to have been a most excellent thing should it succeed in bringing us to our senses. For, as matters are, and according to the accepted standard of "respectability," we would give welcome to neither a Henry Fielding with his "Tom Jones," a Smollett, a Swift, a W. L. George, a Lawrence, a George Moore nor even a Shakespeare with his Sonnets. Much less could we have a Balzac, a De Maupassant, a Murger or a Moliere. As it is, we are debarred from much that is well worth while from the pens of foreign authors, while there is a very active underground trade, as every man knows, in stuff that is frankly pornographic.

IX.

SO THEY MARRIED AND—

Just now, I turned to a pile of common novels, the sort that is here today and gone tomorrow, and opened them at the last page. Somewhere there I found that "she floated into his arms," "the strains of the Wedding March were borne on an afternoon air," "You are the only one I have lived for," or some such sentence.

I also find that of ten short stories submitted for inspection, nine deal with the problem of getting a wife.

Now, as will be clear to every thinking man, the problems of life do not end with marriage. Rather do they begin with them. Marriage is not an ideal state, the end of grief, the solution of all problems. In fact, under present economic conditions, it is exactly what has been called an *egosime a deux*. To throw two people together, in everlasting close proximity, is a dangerous thing to do at any time, and in any conditions. The only possible amelioration is a community of intellectual interests between man and wife, which, as we know, is extremely rare. Lacking that, there must be frequent discontent. The two parties to the contract are thrown too much together. The feminine "moods" get on the nerves of the man. The very fact that convention prevents the man from having other female friends, and the woman from having male friends, ex-

acerbates the trouble. The two become more or less isolated and there is revolt—perhaps openly expressed, perhaps hidden. The first fierce sexual appetite being satisfied, "love" passes into coldness and by a natural transition, coldness into dislike. Then come children perhaps, and marriage sinks into a stern, indissolvable partnership with never ending worry and fret for the man, and unending petty toil for the woman. Utter boredom is called virtue and morality. A musty, fusty old pair, yawning in each other's faces on a front porch in utter vacuity, are pointed out by the conventional as a model of contentment. A volume would not exhaust the list of troubles that come when the marriage state is entered. So, let us in writing, paint things as they are to the end that the young shall hold no illusions. Paint no idyllic picture of love in a cottage, nor present something that has but the remotest reference to life as it is.

Edward Carpenter, in his "Love's Coming of Age" has much to say on this subject. The little book is packed full of sound common sense. Stories on the relations of the sexes that do not touch on the triangle feature have been written in plenty, and the *Smart Set* has had many good pages on the theme. But it has been overlooked by Americans, that William Makepeace Thackeray, a satirist second only to Swift, brought a consummate cleverness to bear on the subject. His married couples pass in review before the reader like a series of warnings. We read with amusement, to recognize with seriousness, moving

among us in life the very characters he portrays. We know his *Miss Blanche*, acting the martyr, eyes ever welling with tears, trying to catch a husband who will sympathize with her sensitive heart. We have seen a *Mrs. O'Dowd*, pompous and boastful and proud, bent on marrying every bachelor she can lay her hands on. We know *Amelias*, wildly jealous, leading a husband a devil of a time. We remember many like *Helen Pendennis*, silly country prudes of no education, full of the harshness of Puritanism. We recall decent women like *Lady Castlewood* married to drunken and imbecile boors, and by contrast, high-strung fellows tied to women who have the minds and the education of a kitchen maid. There are families of *Pontos* yawning in solitude, men whose acquaintances are too vulgar for their wives, and wives who scorn their husbands. . . . Go to Thackeray if you would write, and, when tempted to dismiss your characters with the reflection that marriages are made in Heaven, bear in mind that if such was the case, Heaven was often a bad workman as far as generating earthly happiness is concerned.

XI.

SAMPLE SUBJECT SUGGESTIONS.

Whether I was born with a crooked streak, or whether much travel in odd corners of the world and living with odd people has given me a kind of twist I do not know. Some times I am very sorry for myself: but I cannot see things in the way people tell me I

should see them. The worst of it is that this disability of mine places a bar between me and my fellows more often than not. For instance, I cannot see anything very noble, elevating or inspiring in the ritual of secret societies. The "good lessons" that others tell me are to be learned in the hidden arcana, I never find. I draw the most extravagantly wrong inferences from the ritual. Whenever I hear public speakers say nice things which seem to please my neighbors, my mind goes off at a tangent in a kind of examination as it did the other day when I read a story in which much stress was laid on southern hospitality. I very much doubted that there was in the south any more hospitality than in the north, or the east, or the west. Tramping the roads of the south as I often do, I find that one autoist out of twenty-five or so will offer to carry me to the next town. That is about the proportion I found in the north. Of course, in the south, exactly as in the north, where advantages are to be gained, or where favors are to be expected, there is a rush to do honor. If I am known as a writing fellow, I am taken to see the show places, the local sights, the scenic views. But if I happen along dressed as a common laborer, I meet no more hospitality in the south than anywhere else. The watchdog south of the Mason and Dixon line is as unfriendly as his cousin in Ohio or Minnesota. I tell this, not by way of persuading you to my viewpoint, but so that you shall examine at first hand some of the notes which I have made from time to time as bases for prospec-

tive short stories. Given time, I shall make stories around them myself, but, if you beat me to it, well and good. My mental attitude in this respect is much like the hen who cackles when she has laid an egg. She has produced the potential chick, if foster mothers make it actual, well and good. So, if you make a story of any one of these, you have my benison.

First. I read a lecture by Conan Doyle in the course of which he assured us that on the other side of the veil we shall meet our soul mates. Soon after that appeared in print, I had no less than five manuscripts of stories based on the idea that although lovers were separated here, there would be a ringing of bells in heaven when they rushed together, with an eternity before them.

Now it seems to me that some of us who have had experiences, and, in the course of time have been happily delivered from our affinities, would not be elated over the prospect that Doyle sets before us. There's a story there.

Second. A fairly well-written pamphlet foretold a time when Labor, uprising in its might would put all executives to work with pick and shovel, hammer and saw, when the day of rejoicing would be at hand.

My note on this would suggest a story to the effect that a couple of dozen really first-class executives drawn from capitalistic enterprises, and paid a higher wage than they could hope for in their old jobs, would marshal the forces of Labor and win for it the victory it craves. The story would go on to show that Labor is

not willing to undertake the sacrifice that would lead to victory: that it is mistrustful and too prone to treat its own friends with coldness, denunciation, ridicule, suspicion; that it is too prone to hot air and sentimentality. The conclusion would be drawn as a salutary lesson to Labor, that while Capital measures all things by dollars and cents, it is not too stingy to pay a good price for what it wants. Consequently it wins, for money gets the man.

Third. An editorial told of the good time coming when Labor and Capital shall meet face to face.

I do not believe in any such good time, and would do all in my power to prevent such a meeting. My reasons would be that in the past, Labor and Capital have met face to face, and the clash of countenances was like unto that when two rams meet, both of whom are enamoured of the same ewe. I project a story then setting that forth, with the ultimate decision arrived at that Capital admits it must get all that it can at the lowest price, and Labor must get all it can at the least exertion cost. Under such circumstances, it is idle to hope for agreement, and my story should show both parties putting aside camouflage and agreeing on the issue.

Fourth. In a secret society, I heard a national official talk for an hour or more on the elevating influence of lodge work, praising the members present for their attention to duty.

My story would show that most men attend lodge as a refuge and a hiding place, to escape the boredom of home, wife and children and

that lodge work was really nothing but solemn play, and neither religion nor a substitute for it.

Fifth. In high wrath, a man wrote a letter to a local paper denouncing the editor for the stand he had taken. The man then felt that he had stung the editor, and imagined him squirming under the blows received.

Write a story showing that under such circumstances a newspaper editor is highly pleased, for the objecting letter shows him that for once the bombastic nonsense he has written was read.

IX.

ON STYLE.

On the subject of style, the authors of books telling how to write, flounder solemnly. They remind me very much of Van Vechten's tale of the rather massive female who tried to explain a cubistic production to an outspoken doubter and coming a cropper in the effort, proved that she knew nothing about the subject. The said doubter had declared that "There's always a lot of talk, but nothing is clear." And it is exactly so when self appointed instructors arise to explain "style" in literature.

Perhaps if you get this into your mind it will serve. To tell a story, two persons are involved—a writer and a reader. It is the business of the writer to win, *to persuade the reader*. All the rest follows. The writer must choose the clearest way, the nearest way, the

most pleasant way. His manner of doing that is his style.

Next, how shall style be attained? Take Thoreau for your teacher in this. He said: "If you have anything to say it will fall from you as a stone falls from your hand." You know that is true. Of course, different men will have different ways of expressing themselves just as they have mannerisms in their daily acts. But we must remember that one man's style will not fit another man. Imitation is idle. That is all I can tell you about style. I could wrap what I have said above into a cloak of ornamental language or cover it layer upon layer with elaborations as the layers of an onion are about a central core, but could say nothing else of value. Still, as many books have been written on the subject by master minds, and as I have those books on my shelves, I shall give you in the paragraph that follows, some idea of what stylists have to say, and, that being done, shall copy for you certain passages from books not very popular and therefore hard to get at, so that for yourself you may see the extraordinary differences in style.

Take Schopenhauer's view. It is to be found in his *Parerga.*

"Every mediocre writer tries to mask his own natural style. . . . If they would go hon estly to work, and say, quite simply, the things they have really thought, and just as they have thought them, these writers would be readable and, within their own proper sphere, even instructive.

"But instead of this they try to make the reader believe that their thoughts have gone

much further and deeper than is really the case. They say what they have to say in long sentences that wind about in a forced and unnatural way; they coin new words and write prolix periods which go round and round in the thought and wrap it up in a sort of disguise. They tremble between the two separate aims of communicating what they want to say and of concealing it. Their object is to dress it up so that it may look learned and deep, in order to give people the impression that there is very much more than for the moment meets the eye." And again: "The first rule for good style is that the author should have something to say."

The English novelist, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in a lecture delivered at the University of Cambridge, has this to say: "As technically manifested in literature it (style) is the power to touch with ease, grace, precision, any note in the gamut of human thought or emotion."

Next take the Frenchman, Comte de Buffon. It was he who said: "The style is the man himself." I think you will understand and enjoy the passage that follows:

"But when he has made a plan, when once he has brought together and put in order all the thoughts essential to his subject, he will see easily the instant when he ought to take up his pen, he will feel with certainty that his mind is ready to bring forth, he will be pressed to give birth to his ideas, and will find only pleasure in writing; his ideas will succeed each other easily, and the style will be natural and ready; the warmth born of this pleasure will diffuse itself everywhere and give life to each expression; the animation will become higher and higher; the tone will become exalted; objects will take on color; and feeling blended with intellect will increase the warm glow, will carry it farther, will make it pass from that which one says to that which one is about to say, and the style will become interesting and luminous."

I cull this for you from John Ruskin:

"So long as no words are uttered but in faithfulness, so long the art of language goes on exalting itself; but the moment it is shaped and chiselled on external principles, it falls into frivolity, and perishes." . . . "No noble nor right style was ever yet founded but out of a sincere heart." . . . "No man is worth reading to form your style, who does not mean what he says; nor was any great style ever invented but by some man who meant what he said."

Now here Thoreau again:

"We are often struck by the force and precision of style to which hard working men, unpracticed in writing, easily attain when required to make the effort. As if plainness and vigor and sincerity, the ornaments of style, were better learned on the farm and in the workshop than in the school."

Reading that, consider Jack London the virile, Robert Burns the boy on the stone bruised farm, John Bunyan the tinker, Masefield the sailor and bartender, W. H. Davies the hobo, Caradoc Evans the boy who was always hungry and tired. The last named mastered English through the study of the Bible. The passage below is taken from his book, "My Neighbors." Except perhaps Bunyan, no better example could be given of sheer force and precision of style.

"Our God is a big man: a tall man much higher than the highest chapel in Wales and broader than the broadest chapel. For the promised day that He comes to deliver us a sermon, we shall have made a hole in the roof and take down a wall. Our God has a long, white beard, and he is not unlike the Father Christmas of picture books. Often He lies on his stomach on the Heaven's floor, an eye at one of his myriad of peep holes watching that we keep his laws.

Our God wears a frock coat, a starched linen collar and a black necktie, and a silk hat, and on the Sabbath He preaches to the congregation of Heaven.

"Heaven is a Welsh chapel: but its pulpit is of gold, and its walls, pews, floor, roof, harmonium, and its clock—which marks the days of the month as well as the hours of the day—are glass. The inhabitants are clothed in white shirts in which they were buried and in which they arose at the Call: and the language of God and his angels and of the Company of the Prophets is Welsh, that being the language spoken in the garden of Eden and by Jacob, Moses, Abraham, and Elijah.

"It is no miracle that we are religious. Our God is just behind the preacher, and He is in the semblance of the preacher and we believe in Him truly. It is no miracle that we are prayerful. Our God is by us in our hagglings and cheatings. Bacca Pehffos prays that the dealers' eyes are closed to the disease of her hen; Shon Porth asks the Big Man to destroy his pregnant sister into whose bed Satan enticed him; Ianto Tybach says: 'Give me a nice bit of haymaking weather, God bach. Strike my brother Enoch dead or blind and see I have his fields without any old bother. A champion am I in the religious and there's gifts I give the preacher. Ask Him. That's all."

Now consider a very different style. It is from Charles Lamb who came nearer achieving perfection than anyone in literature. His art is so cunningly concealed that it has the appearance of almost careless discourse.

"I am no Quaker at my food. I confess I am not indifferent to the kinds of it. Those unctuous morsels of deer's flesh were not made to be received with dispassionate services. I hate a man who swallows it, affecting not to know what he is eating. I suspect his taste in higher matters. I shrink instinctively from one who professes to like minced veal. There is a physiognomical character in the tastes for food.

C— holds that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple dumplings. I am not certain but he is right. With the decay of my first innocence, I confess a less and less relish daily for those innocuous cates. The whole vegetable tribe have lost their gust for me. Only I stick to asparagus, which still seems to inspire gentle thoughts."

At this point I spent a full half hour trying to hit upon a paragraph for reproduction here from Stevenson's "Virginibus Puerisque." But without success. You can no more tear a paragraph from that admirable essay than you can take a jewel from its setting and have the thing as it was. So you must turn to his essay for yourself. You should also read his "Travels with a Donkey." And, while you are about it, do not forget to read much of De Quincey, and also of Goldsmith.

X.

A NEGLECTED FIELD.

There is opportunity in full, a vast field to exploit in the writing of juveniles, to use the term applied to that branch of literature which appeals to the young. It is especially the case in stories appealing to growing girls who, having passed from the excellent *John Martin's Book* stage and into the *St. Nicholas* age, are unwilling to leap forthright into Gene Stratton Porter and Harold Bell Wright. In England, and imported into the eastern states, there used to be a well edited journal called the *Girls' Own Paper*, but it is imported no

longer. No one has quite taken the place of Louisa May Alcott, or Margaret Sidney with her Pepper Series.

Good stories for boys too are comparatively rare, though the *Youth's Companion*, leader in this field, pays well, is well edited and widely read. Lads of a past generation fared far better for reading matter than those of today. There was a border land as it were, a literature that interested men as well as boys of spirit. The work of Jules Verne, so admirably translated, is with us and our publishers, sadly neglected. His books, together with the stories of adventure by Paul de Chaillu, led millions of lads to higher reading planes. Then there was Harrison Ainsworth with his semi-historical fiction, Ballantyne with his short tales of fire-fighters, sailors, lifeboat men and others in adventurous callings, and Thomas Hughes and his host of followers with bright school-boy tales. England has some good work in that direction today, especially in what is being done by Henry Newbolt who writes of old warriors and new, of deeds of derring-do and wild adventure, nor should we omit Frank T. Bullen with his "Cruise of the Cachalot" and other tales, or Basil Lubbock, fit successor to Dana. I particularly urge ambitious writers to look into this field of literature. Our lads today are fed up to nausea with tales of Boy Scouts, square-chinned lads who, single-handed, routed German regiments, captains of industry in embryo, amateur detectives and all that sort of thing. What we need, is, not to

try to rob boyhood of its golden days and to thrust ideas of business success into them, but to offer them food for lively imaginations. Give them reading for reading's sake and not for some ulterior motive. Boys do not want "lessons" in books any more than they need "lessons" in a ball game. There is where I would take issue with Franklin K. Matthews of the Boy Scout movement who, not so long ago at a publishers' convention, said that there was a great field for exploitation in the ten million boys hungry for reading matter. So far so good, but, urging publishers to cultivate this field, he quoted the wife of a college professor with approval who had expressed her desire to "do something to keep the boys sensibly occupied on Sunday afternoons" and had added that "parents do not believe in dare-devil books which would be of interest to boys."

Now I hold that if we are to raise a generation of readers, we must do exactly contrary to that which is here suggested. Consider. If you read the Matthews' quotation with care, you catch a faint and fusty flavor that recalls "best" rooms with cloth-covered round tables bearing books set at mathematically arranged distances apart, radiating from a center of imitation fruit, done in wax, covered with a glass shade. You will also get a sense of a prim lady handing you a copy of Samuel Smiles' "Self Help," with the injunction, "Be good, because it's Sunday."

With no respect whatever for anyone's opin-

ion, when Mr. Matthews and the wife of a college professor, together with the objecting parents attempt to exercise surveillance over the boy's reading, and affect the illimitable conceit that they know what is, and what is not, proper, they not only stultify themselves, but proclaim themselves the enemies of boys, and, further, take the first step towards disrupting an organization that has a power for good—an organization that so far has not been captured for ulterior motives. Frenzied with the fashionable fever for prohibition, they rush to join that

> Sect whose chief devotion lies
> In odd, perverse antipathies:
> In falling out with that or this
> And finding somewhat still amiss.

Sturdy of growth though the Boy Scout movement is, be sure that any reptant Puritanical interference will most assuredly result in labefaction.

A boy is an unspoilt man, and these are the elements that enter into his character: enthusiasm, fervor, courage and generosity. A boy is both unmoral and unreligious. He has a sublime contempt of custom and of conventionality, and is almost destitute of selfishness. Moreover, he is assured of his right to his own opinion and the correctness of his own choice. That he is a chosen instrument for the emancipation of the human race: that he, once untrammeled, can achieve the triumph of justice over centuries of oppression; that,

once attaining manhood, he will right all wrongs, he is as certain as he is of his own existence. His heroes, he insists, shall be endowed with similar qualities. Further, and this Mr. Matthews and the college professor's wife, with objecting parents, should mark well, the average, normal boy has a deep conviction that parents, preachers and teachers are narrow-minded old fogies, either eternally shamming or showing off, utterly destitute of originality, and full of silly prejudice. The boys are not far wrong. Therefore, the obnoxious officiousness—but what's the use.

As to dare devil books, can any normal, sensible man, not a *Stiggins*, a *Pecksniff*, or a *Uriah Heep*, put his finger on any book of that class, that he read when a lively boy, and say, "If I had not read this, I would have been a better, wealthier, healthier man; I would today have been saner, holier, wiser?" Can any reading man who has lived with those gallant dare-devil creations that he learned to love and admire before he knew *Becky Sharp* or *Hester Prynne*, or *Corporal Trim*, say that he would willingly obliterate the memory of any one of them? On the other hand, mentally reviewing an imaginary parade of boyhood heroes, does not one's heart beat quicker, does there not come a thrill of joy as the golden days before disillusionment are recalled?

Picture the procession! It will do you good. No Barnum and Bailey amalgamation of circuses can match, nor civic pageant pale it.

The great iron gates of the boys' Valhalla fly open with a clang, and the lank-jawed, pestiferous prohibitionist flees before the noble throng. All brave in their Lincoln green, *Robin Hood* and his merry men lead the way. You see *Friar Tuck* and *Little John*, *Will Scarlett*, and *Alan-a-Dale*. *Jack Shephard* follows, keen eyed and lithe, a merry rogue laughing at shackles and handcuffs, to whom Houdini is but a pale ghost. *Dick Turpin* too is there astride of his bonny *Black Bess*, and *Claude Duval* the gallant, with *Cartouche*, and *Monte Cristo* mysterically visible in his sack. Captain Kidd with blood stained bandage marches with Jesse James and the Younger brothers, and *Phileas Fogg* the imperturbable, unsmiling and resolute, touches elbows with John L. Sullivan and Jake Kilrain. *Quasimodo* comes, and George the runner and Beach the oarsman, *Long John Silver* and old man *Pew*, *Gagool* and *Natty Bumpo*, *Gordon Pym* and the Man in the Iron Mask, *Allen Quatermain* and Gaborieu's detectives. Covered with yellow dust of New Mexico, glittering with silver and gold, ride the immortal Scalp Hunters and the plainsmen of Captain Mayne Reid, while the *Iron Pirate* and *Jack Harkaway* go arm in arm. Sailors, fire fighters, cowboys, whalers, smugglers thicker throng. Spears, banners, bayonets, lassoes, boledores, battle axes and marlinspikes bristle above massed heads. Wild, strange oaths fill the air. Steel clashes on steel. Then comes a crowd of heroes so compact that with difficulty you pick out one here and there—trim *Midshipman Easy*,

Harry Lorrequer, Peter Simple, Handy Andy, Percival Keene, Baron Munchausen, Ned Kelley the iron clad Australian bush ranger, *Tracy* the outlaw, *Valentine Vox*, Peace the burglar, *Athos, Porthos, Aramis*, the *Wandering Jew*. Not a woman, not a seducer, not a pestilential prohibitionist in all that glorious, golden, glittering galaxy. Not a saint, a statesman or an uplifter there. Not one could you find to be accused of injustice, of prejudice, of narrow mindedness. Not one but would leap to quarter-staff, to bow, to mace, to dirk, to pistol or musket in defense of liberty and freedom. Not a solitary religious character would you find, except it be Sampson, admitted by reason of his house-wrecking activities.

By all the gods, if this little book shall result in but one rattling good short story, one real good tale of adventure, just one good story for boys that are boys, and not tight fisted men before their time, the writing of it shall have been well worth the while and Mr. Haldeman-Julius will have conferred a benefit on his generation by publishing this. So go to it if you can. Forget "moral lessons," "improvement of the juvenile mind" and all that nonsense and give the best that is in you.

YOUR MARKET.

Use common sense when sending your manuscript. Read the magazines and mark the kind of story they use. For example, should you have a story dealing with the *egoism a deux* called marriage, it would be of no use to send

it to the *Saturday Evening Post.* Similarly, a tale of business success would find no friendly reception in the office of the *Dial.*

There are many magazines, especially the younger ventures, exceedingly hospitable to unknown writers. I name the *Double Dealer*, Vincent Starret's *Wave*, the *Reviewer*, and *Broom.*

For established magazines with editors very much on the *qui vive* for good work, watch the *Century*, *Smart Set*, *Little Review*, *Freeman* and *Midland.* There are probably many others, but I'm speaking from my own experience.

I would advise you to read the editorials and literary criticisms of H. L. Mencken in the *Smart Set*, Glen Frank in the *Century*, and if you care for this, my own periodical *"All's Well."*

There follows a very complete list giving the addresses of magazines using short stories.

Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City.
Ainslee's Magazine, 79 7th Ave., New York City.
All's Well, Fayetteville, Ark.
American Boy, 142 Lafayette Blvd., Detroit, Mich.
American Magazine, 381 Fourth Ave., New York City.
Argosy All-Story, 280 Broadway, New York City.
Asia, 627 Lexington Ave., New York City.
Atlantic Monthly, 8 Arlington St., Boston, Mass.
Black Cat, 229 West 28th St., New York City.

Broom, 3 East 9th St., New York City.
Catholic World, 120 West 60th St., New York City.
Century, 353 4th Ave., New York City.
Collier's Weekly, 416 West 13th St., New York City.
Cosmopolitan Magazine, 119 West 40th St., New York City.
Dial, 152 West 13th St., New York City.
Double Dealer, 204 Baronne St., New Orleans, La.
Everybody's Magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City.
Freeman, 32 West 58th St., New York City.
Good Housekeeping, 119 West 40th St., New York City.
Harper's Bazaar, 119 West 40th St., New York City.
Harper's Magazine, Franklin Square, New York City.
Hearst's Magazine, 119 West 40th St., New York City.
Holland's Magazine, Dallas, Tex.
Ladies' Home Journal, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pa.
Liberator, 34 Union Square East, New York City.
Little Review, 24 West 16th St., New York City.
Little Story Magazine, 714 Drexel Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa.
Live Stories, 35 West 39th St., New York City.
McCall's Magazine, 236 West 37th St., New York City.
McClure's Magazine, 76 Fifth Ave., New York City.
Magnificant, Manchester, N. H.
Metropolitan, 432 4th Ave., New York City.
Midland, Glennie, Alcona County, Mich.
Munsey's Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.
Outlook, 381 5th Ave., New York City.
Pagan, 7 East 15th St., New York City.
Parisienne, 25 West 45th St., New York City.
People's Favorite Magazine, 79 7th Ave., New York City.

Pictorial Review, 216 West 39th St., New York City.

Popular Magazine, 79 West 39th Ave., New York City.

Queen's Work, 626 North Vandeventer Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Reviewer, 809½ Floyd Ave., Richmond, Va.

Saturday Evening Post, Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pa.

The Red Book Magazine, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Scribner's Magazine, 597 5th Ave., New York City.

Short Stories, Garden City, Long Island, New York City.

Smart Set, 25 West 45th St., New York City.

Snappy Stories, 35 West 39th St., New York City.

Sunset, 460 Fourth St., San Francisco, Calif.

Today's Housewife, Coopertown, N. Y.

Top-Notch Magazine, 79 West 47th Ave., New York City.

Toutchstone, 1 West 47th St., New York City.

The Woman's Home Companion, 381 4th Ave., New York City.

Woman's World, 107 South Clinton St., Chicago, Ill.

A word in conclusion. Keep your ears open as well as your eyes. You will find it pays to be somewhat of what Shakespeare called a "snapper up of unconsidered trifles." On every side of us, good things are being said, characters are being revealed. It was but last week when saying something to a lad who was plowing, I being sorry for what I took to be very hard work, he said:

"Why, I love it—turning up the sod, seeing the different things coming up all the time, the smell of the earth, hearing the purr of the plow and the little grunts of the horses—it's fun."

If you do not see strength and ecstasy and philosophy in that, you are hopeless.

At a meeting, I heard a business man say:

"Although there was a talkative crowd there, I ate silently, revolving plans."

The five words "I ate silently, revolving plans" presents a picture. An inexpert writer might waste words in vain putting the idea across to a reader that a man engrossed in his business withdrew from the confusion about him. Observe, the conversation of men is not often clear cut, sharp chiseled. Too often it is a macedoine of tautologies, contradictions, slang and inaccuracy, but let a man think strongly on any one thing, and ten to one what he has to say comes out clear cut. It is the flake of gold in the midst of much gravel that you must learn to catch.

I find this again in my notebook. Two girls were talking in a street car and I could not but help overhear. It was poor stuff and uninteresting, with much of "I says" and "says he to me" and "I says, says I" but in one place this came like a bright light:

"I did not hear the reply, because of the faint rustle of my own movements."

The sentence stands perfect. What it conveys could not be better put.

Once I heard an old sailor telling a tale. He was full of oaths and obscenities and he wandered in the telling of it. Then this came:

"As the sun sank, a patch of trees on the point stood out against the light and it seemed that they had come by magic."

A Texas freighter I heard say of a man:

"He had the gift of friendship."

This was said by a child of seven years: "She was so proud, that she became white and tight lipped."

If you will examine the examples given, you will see that each speaker had something to express, and expressed it directly. There was no stuffing, no padding.

As an example of positive flash of insight, I copy this from the story "Villette" by Currer Bell:

"The cook, in a jacket, a short petticoat, and sabots, brought me supper, to wit, some meat, nature unknown, served in an odd and acid but pleasant sauce; some chopped potatoes made savory with I know not what, vinegar and sugar, I think; a tartarine or slice of bread and butter and a baked pear. Being hungry, I ate and was grateful."

The passage that next follows, I find in my scrap book clipped from *T. P.'s Weekly*. It is the opinion of an old grayheaded man at Rydal Mount who remembered Wordsworth and who, in spite of the evidence of many poems, held that the Lake poet had no interest in children.

"He never cared for childer, however; yan may be cartain of that, for didn't I have to pass him four times in t' week, up to the door wi' meat: and he niver onest said owt. Ye're well aware if he'd been fond of children, he 'ud 'a spoke."

Now watch how Mark Twain does things. His Huckleberry Finn talks as the boys that you know talk, and, like so many of the unlearned, he supports his views with a phil-

osophical tag. He is giving his opinion of the *King* and the *Duke*, two rapscallions who were parasites on the lads.

"It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars wasn't no kings and dukes at all, but just low down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself. It's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels and don't get into no trouble."

And this, for scenic description in miniature, with a record of personal impression is hard to beat:

"It was a-kind of solemn, drifting down the big, still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars; and we didn't feel like talkin' loud and it wasn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of a low chuckle."

One more passage I must quote from Huckleberry. Compare it with the brief remark of the plowboy I copied for you, for Huck might have said what that lad said, or that lad might have talked as did Huck:

"Not a sound anywheres—perfectly still—just like the whole world was asleep, only sometimes the bullfrogs a-clattering maybe. The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line—that was the woods on t'other side—you couldn't make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness; spreading around; then the river softened up, away off, and warn't black any more, but gray; you could see little dark spots driftin' along, ever so far away—tradin' scows an' such things; and long black streaks—rafts; sometimes you could hear a sweep

screaking; or jumbled up voices, it was so still, and sounds come so far; and by and by you could see a streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak that there's a snag there in the swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way."

Perhaps, if you have never tried to write a story, you will think that it is an easy task to put into the words of an unlettered lad a description such as that. But try. If you can come anything near it you will do well. If you can do as well as that your future as a writer is assured. Doubtless, you as a boy loved the still and solemn night, the creatures in the woods—squirrels, turtles, snakes. Doubtless, you too looked with indignation upon the things men did around you. If so, you have the foundation for a story within you. All that remains to be done then is to set down your own experiences without holding back, without exaggeration—to set down the things as they were in simple, plain words; to remember, all the time, that truth is the final test of literature.

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